

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

May 19, 2006

Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D.
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 8017
Baltimore, MD 21244-8017

Dear Dr. McClellan:

I greatly appreciate the special enrollment period (SEP) extension granted to Katrina evacuees allowing them to join and switch plans, include Medicare prescription drug plans, at any time through December 31, 2006. However, a story in The Time-Picayune on May 12, 2006 stated that hurricane evacuees will have a one percent penalty tacked onto their new Medicare premium for every month they delay after the May 15, 2006 deadline. Granting this extension while still imposing a monetary penalty is unacceptable. A great injustice will be committed if you allow Katrina affected Medicare beneficiaries to be penalized for signing up for their prescription drug benefit.

Louisiana has a total of 627, 207 Medicare beneficiaries. As of April 2006, only 40% of those eligible had voluntarily enrolled in a stand-alone Medicare Drug Plan. Therefore, it is very likely that half of Louisiana beneficiaries still need to enroll. Under this reported structure, they will be penalized for their late enrollment despite the SEP put in place.

You are well aware of the devastation caused by the hurricane to all Louisianians' lives especially those most vulnerable, the sick and the elderly. Temporary emergency exceptions must be made to ensure that these older citizens enroll in a prescription drug plan at this critical juncture in their lives. There has never been a time in Louisiana history that is more important than now to provide Medicare beneficiaries access to health care especially prescription drugs.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to hearing from you by close of business Tuesday, May 23, 2006.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu
United States Senator